MEMO TO: Michigan House Committee on Tourism and Outdoor Recreation
FROM: Omari Rush, Executive Director
DATE: January 28, 2018
SUBJECT: Committee Hearing Testimony, January 28, 2018

Good morning, Chair Hughes and members of the Michigan House Committee on Tourism and Outdoor Recreation, and thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today at your committee hearing.

My name is Omari Rush and I am executive director of CultureSource, a Detroit-based arts and culture alliance that supports organizations in having positive social impacts in Southeast Michigan communities through creative and cultural expression.

Some of those organizations are represented here today and I very much appreciate their work providing opportunities for Michigan residents and visitors alike to enjoy the natural, cultural, historic, and artistic assets of our state.

My own personal adventures traversing the state allow me to speak first hand of theses assets with excitement and pride. For instance, despite grey weather I've marveled at Picture Rocks, I've spent Christmas cross country skiing at Nub's Nob with my dad, I've been guided through the Ford Rouge Factory Tour, and I've wandered through Ann Arbor's Art Fairs and Grand Rapids's ArtPrize.

My experiences of Michigan delight are not unique to me. My colleagues in arts organizations around the country have expressed, repeatedly, how much they've enjoyed convenings hosted in Michigan. In fact, I was just in Washington, DC last week for an urban arts federation meeting and from my peers at the convening who work in the country's largest and most lauded metro areas, I fielded frequent questions about visiting Detroit.

So, thank you for your work nurturing and supporting the vitality of distinctive sites, events, and enterprises around the state, and for making it easy for me to brag about Michigan when I'm traveling.

I would also like to share one more statement of thanks wearing a different hat.

Back in 2010, I was appointed by Governor Granholm to the state of Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs, and just recently, Governor Snyder appointed me council chair. Our state arts council has a mission to encourage, initiate, and facilitate an enriched artistic, cultural, and creative environment in Michigan. It achieves this most notably through grantmaking to Michigan-based arts and cultural nonprofit organizations and projects.

On behalf of my fellow council members and the agency's staff, and more importantly on behalf of the citizens of Michigan, thank you for your investment in the arts and culture sector.

While the council had just over $1M for grant awards in 2010—that is, for the whole state—your acknowledgement, through legislative appropriations, of the strong and reliable returns the come from investing in Michigan's arts and culture sector brought that grant award total up to nearly $10M in FY2017, with grant awards reaching 78 of Michigan's 83 counties.

These funds support peer-reviewed organizations that are creating jobs, funding capital improvements in neighborhoods, infusing school children's days with field trips and classroom artists, and attracting visitors to outdoor performance venues and restaurants in town centers. So again, thank you.

Among all of the activities and organizations I've mentioned, I'm particularly excited now by work we're doing at CultureSource to enhance the capacities of our member organizations to fill concert spaces with audiences, fill nature and science centers with families, and fill museums with curious observers of all ages.

CultureSource has 139 member organizations that represent the range of cultural institutions, from those large enough to anchor the whole state or the region to others so small that they anchor a single neighborhood. Our members focus on presenting touring performances and exhibitions, producing their own creative work, and hosting hands- learning experiences. And the spending by out-of-towners and tourists related to our members' activities is good for local businesses and jobs.

CultureSource is well positioned to help our alliance go even further in enhancing the impacts of their work, and moving forward we will do this by focusing on four areas:
We will support the health of organizations and their ability to operate sustainably and efficiently. We will promote the visibility of the arts and cultural sector, including its impacts, people, programs, and physical presence. We will facilitate access to creative ideas and experiences that spark imagination. And we will pursue opportunities to improve general community well being through arts and culture.

As a specific example of our work—one related to our visibility efforts—we are partnering with Quicken Loans on a springtime project to present pop-up cultural experiences in the middle of downtown Detroit. These unique activations are designed to dazzle passersby and point to new possibilities for pop-up programming in public space. We are very excited about the ideas our call for proposals generated. We look forward to announcing winners soon and having their ephemeral engagements show up in social media with hashtags that call out Detroit and reinforce the positive perceptions of Michigan as a destination for fun and leisure.

Again, I appreciate you allowing me to share thoughts about arts and culture in Michigan, and please do let me know how I can be a resource to you in advancing your committee's work.